

THE EVOLUTION OF GEOMORPHOLOGY: A NATION-BY-NATION SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT edited by H. J. Walker and W. E. Grabau, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1993. No. of pages: xvi + 539. Price: £95.00. ISBN 0-471-93858-0.

Thirty years ago scarcely anybody was interested in the history of geomorphology. Today there is a modest literature devoted to the subject. Indeed, there are now almost as many volumes descriptive of the history of geomorphology as there were English-language texts of geomorphology during my own undergraduate years in the 1950s. Our world is being swept by retromania and in that, I hasten to add, I see nothing regrettable.

In 1989 there was founded the International Association of Geomorphologists, and at the inaugural meeting in Frankfurt there was distributed a volume entitled *The History of Geomorphology* published by the Japanese Geomorphological Union. The work presently under review is an expanded version of that volume. Aside from its editorial introduction, the work consists of chapters describing the history of geomorphology within 53 different nations, arranged alphabetically from Algeria and Argentina to Uruguay and the former Yugoslavia. The essays are all in English and the editors must be congratulated upon their assembly of so many contributions emanating from so comprehensive a range of cultural backgrounds.

There are a few notable gaps in the coverage. In western Europe, for instance, Denmark, Ireland and Norway are all absentees. I hope I will be forgiven my chauvinism if I observe that Ireland should certainly have been accorded a place, because she gave to geomorphology the terms 'drumlin' and 'esker', and because Jukes's paper of 1862 on the rivers of southern Ireland was global in its repercussions. The two editors of the volume hail from the American Deep South well beyond the limits of the Illinoian ice. Do the omissions from their

volume of certain nations well-endowed with glacial phenomena reflect a tendency to what Freud might have termed 'ice envy'?

The volume will become a major reference work for all who are interested in the history of the Earth sciences and it must find its place in any self-respecting geosciences library. Particularly valuable are the bibliographies following each essay and listing the papers deemed to be seminal within each national context. I was surprised how very interesting I found most of the essays to be, and from them there emerges a fascinating global picture of geomorphic seeds being dispersed from an 18th century European nursery and then taking root throughout the world. As I read, my fingers itched to employ the material here presented as the basis for global dispersion maps using geo-isophenes (if I may coin that term) to indicate the flowering dates of geomorphic concepts in the various parts of our globe.

Historians of sciences often complain about scientists who imagine themselves to possess historical skills. Historians of phrenology never take up the scalpel of the brain surgeon, so why should brain surgeons imagine themselves to be equipped with the skills necessary to allow them to pen histories of phrenology? In this volume, practising geomorphologists have allowed themselves to become votaries of Clio. And right well have they performed their task. But there is something that I cannot allow. I cannot allow the editors to assume the monarchical privilege of ennoblement, even if it be a retrospective honour. They are wrong on pages 1 and 6 in their bestowment of a knighthood upon John Walker. Nor, I must add, do I believe a word of what they tell us about the geomorphic significance of that onetime Scottish cleric.

GORDON L. HERRIES DAVIES
Department of Geography
Trinity College, Dublin

ALLUVIAL SEDIMENTATION edited by M. Marzo and C. Pudefábreas, International Association of Sedimentologists, Special Publication No. 17, Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1993. No. of pages: xi + 586. Price: £70.00. ISBN 0-632-03545-5.

If I close my eyes, I can still vividly remember the smell of the best seafood paella I've ever had, the warm evening sun on a Sitges streetfront bar, the superb Spanish field excursions and a most enjoyable 4th Fluvial Sedimentology Conference. Opening my eyes and looking down on my desk, is this really the volume of the meeting before me in 1993? Is it really nearly 5 years since the event and, well, haven't I seen some of these papers before in some form, in a past life? The birth of this book after

the longest gestation and labour pains of many a conference baby, epitomises both the best and worst of conference volumes. The best: a beautifully produced series of papers dealing with a wide range of material on fluvial systems and several papers that are destined to become benchmarks. The worst: the time to publication which is such that many papers are no longer at the sharp edge that they were when presented or written. In this case, the 4th fluvial baby sees the light of day after that from the succeeding 1993 fluvial conference held in Brisbane in July 1993! (*Sedimentary Geology*, Vol. 85). Many of the papers you'll find in *Alluvial Sedimentation* may therefore seem familiar or a little dated—you could have seen preprints of these or found them cited in more recent literature (or grant proposals or CVs!). At least you can now read them.